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ABSTRACT

Given the findings that females and males of all ages approach sport from markedly different perspectives, sport sociologists have acknowledged sex differences in sport socialization factors and processes. (Sport is defined in its broadest sense to encompass a range of formal and informal sport, fitness, play, and leisure activities.) It has been implied, and sometimes stated explicitly, that if females were socialized to be more like males (a deficit model), they would be better equipped to avail themselves of the full range of sport options. This paper offers a feminist critique of selected studies, representative of feminist and nonfeminist research, which examine the connected topics of children's sex-specific play patterns and girls' and women's entry into and continued participation in sport. Where there is evidence of the deficit model, alternative interpretations and explanations based on radical feminist analysis are proposed. The critique shows up serious sex biases in research instruments due to the entrenched assumption that competitiveness is a mark of the superior male sport orientation. Even qualitative findings are subject to misinterpretation if the female deficit model is not challenged. (JD)

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Toward a New Interpretation of Female Values in School and Community Sport

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As in other areas in the sociology of sport, much of the research on socialization into sport, until recently, investigated boys' and men's behaviour and experience, and subsequently generalized from these findings to both sexes. An equally serious sex-related bias was the development of methodologies and theoretical models grounded exclusively in male athletes' experience; females and nonathletes were not studied. Social-cultural factors such as class and race/ethnicity were also neglected (Greendorfer 1987; Duda, 1981, 1986; Hasbrook, 1986, 1987).

It is the more recent research on sex differences in socialization that I will address, from a feminist perspective, in this paper. In the past decade, given the clearcut findings that females and males of all ages approach sport from markedly different perspectives, sport sociologists have acknowledged sex differences in sport socialization factors and processes. However, like much of the sex difference research across the sciences and social sciences, many of these studies equate such differences with female deficiency. In other words, they imply, or sometimes state explicitly, that if females were socialized to be more like males, they would be better equipped to avail themselves of the full range of sport options.

In this deficit model of sex equality, only female behaviour is problematized; male behaviour is not questioned and the social construction of sport by and for men is not addressed. Concepts and theoretical frameworks are grounded in research on males subjects; in quantitative studies, research instruments using traditional male values and attitudes as the yardstick

either devalue or ignore female perspectives; in qualitative studies, findings are interpreted in relation to the most 'mature' or 'advanced' levels of behaviour, which are taken to be the attitudes and actions of the majority of males. Some liberal feminists, too, failed to question the nature of sport or the assumption that the male route to sporting participation is necessarily the best or the only one (e.g. Felshin and Oglesby, 1986; Pomfret, 1986; Safrit, 1987; Lehr and Washington, 1987). Some of the policy implications of the deficit model are apparent in the wake of Title IX legislation in the US (Uhlir, 1987) and the Sport Canada policy that calls for an end to women-only national sports organizations (Sport Canada, 1986).

Some of the literature now shows evidence of a more balanced and egalitarian perspective, recognizing that, while sex equity certainly means equal opportunity, access and funding for females in sport, it does not necessarily signify the continued uncritical acceptance of aggression and a win-at-all-costs mentality, nor does it mean the denial of female values such as cooperation and connection, friendship and enjoyment - values that research has shown to be important for most girls and women. Many progressive physical educators now recognize that each sex has something of value to learn from the other regarding values and attitudes to sport, and that, if true equality of opportunity prevails, sport will inevitably change in the process (Greendorfer, 1980; Hoferek, 1982; Humberstone, 1986; Hoppes, 1987).

However, less optimistically, one could argue that in a

male-dominated field such as sport, the pressure on women to abandon female values is difficult to withstand. In a provocative article titled "Will women change technology or will technology change women?" scientist and peace activist Ursula Franklin examined the status of women in engineering and other nontraditional professions. She observed that survival in these hostile environments probably means, for women, a denial of "the values of the women's world," where personal loyalty, continuity, experience, flexibility, "copeability" and diversity of skills take priority over hierarchy, authority, predictability, planning and productivity. (Franklin, 1985). It may be unrealistic to assume that women in fields such as science, business or sport have the power to challenge male values, or to assume that these women necessarily see the need for social change.

In this paper, I will provide a feminist critique of selected studies, representative of feminist and nonfeminist research, that examine the connected topics of children's sex-specific play patterns and girls' and women's entry into and continued participation in sport. Where there is evidence of the deficit model, I will propose alternative interpretations and explanations based on a radical feminist analysis. Sport will be defined in its broadest sense to encompass a broad range of formal and informal sport, fitness, play and leisure activities.

Gilligan's groundbreaking work on girls' and women's approaches to relationships -- their perceptions of themselves in relation to, rather than separate from others -- provides a crucial key to understanding sex-specific approaches to sport (Gilligan, 1982, 1983) although only a small minority of studies

cite her theories. Gilligan's research showed how girls and women value the "web of connection" and view aggression as a threat to a safe social world because it disrupts human relationships. Faced with moral dilemmas, females were more likely to make decisions based on the ethic of care, while males adhered to the ethic of justice. In the context of sport, it has been suggested that the structured, rule-bound aggression of competitive sport may represent a safe mode of interpersonal connection for males, but for females it may pose a threat to this connection (Bredemeier, 1983). Although Gilligan's sample was quite small, the majority of the empirical studies cited below, representing females of various ages and diverse social class and racial/ethnic backgrounds, substantiate her claims in the context of play and sport.

One of the most widely cited sources on children's play is Janet Lever's work (1976, 1978) on the complexity of play patterns among white, middle-class, grade 5 children. She found that boys' games outranked girls on every dimension of complexity on her scale. For example, boys introduced a competitive structure into 65% of their games, compared to 37% for girls; 30% of boys and 10% of girls played competitive, organized team games. Lever rated activities like skating, hiking and horse-riding - all worthwhile recreational pursuits that were popular among girls - as low on the complexity scale and therefore inferior.

Lever stressed the value of social skills learned by boys through their complex, competitive games: strategic thinking,

experience with leadership, achievement orientation, self-control, sportsmanship and learning to "depersonalize" confrontations in the sport context. She noted, too, the clear evidence of continuity between boys' play patterns and adult male roles, and cited a study of women in top management positions who claimed to have been "former tomboys." (Hennig and Jardim, 1977). But as Gilligan (1982) pointed out, Lever equated male development with child development, favouring the male model because it was compatible with corporate success.

Another 1977 publication on the 'women in management' theme was Betty Harragan's Games Your Mother Never Taught You, which instructed aspiring female executives on the connections between men's sport mentality and the corporate ladder. This self-help route to learning and playing by men's rules has characterised much of the popular advice literature to women in business or other nontraditional fields since the late 1970s. Moreover, the underlying assumption that girls' and women's deficiences are responsible for their lack of success, or worse, their (alleged) fear of success, in sport, business or other male preserves, is prevalent in scholarly as well as popular literature.

As recently as 1986, an article in Proteus asked the question: "If your daughter wants a business career should you encourage her to play team sports?" (Berlage, 1986). It included the results of a survey that asked fathers of girls in competitive soccer about the attributes of sport that would be useful in a business career. Leadership, self-discipline, competitiveness and teamwork were the most commonly listed attributes, ranging from 66% to 55% of the responses, and 65%

stated that they believed a woman who played competitive sport had an advantage in applying for jobs. This may seem to be a dramatic change in male attitudes to competitive female athletes, but its underlying conservatism soon becomes apparent: the male-defined, male-dominated business world would not be threatened by the entry of women who have undergone a thorough socialization in the values of male sport. On the other hand, infiltration by feminists, socialists, environmentalists or pacifists, for example, would certainly be unwelcome in the corporate world.

The dimensions of complexity in play and games developed by Lever were obviously derived from male-defined, male-dominated team sports that are characterized by hierarchy, fixed rules, and competition -- not coincidentally, the values of western capitalism and the military-industrial complex. Boys' team games, according to Lever, prepare them to deal with competition "in a forthright manner." Having one's close friend as an opponent in organized team sport is portrayed, for boys, as a valuable exercise in 'depersonalizing' aggression - another way of saying, "being able to hurt someone you like with no qualms." The parallels with military training are disturbingly clear.

A study of adolescent female football players reported that coaches promoted and rewarded instrumental violence (violent acts that violated the rules), with the result that female players were just as likely as male players to engage in these acts. However, girls showed significantly lower legitimation of such acts as a necessary component of the game; they still saw them as violent (Pilz, 1982). Presumably, these girls have not succeeded

in "depersonalizing" aggression; feminists might find this resistance heartening.

The social and affective aspects of girls' games, such as cooperation, flexibility, friendship and enjoyment, have no place in Lever's model. Girls' relative lack of concern about winning and losing, their willingness to modify rules, their patience in taking turns and their concern for maintaining connections with their friends during recess (even to the point of spending the time talking rather than playing, as noted by Lever) are devalued or dismissed.

Greendorfer's early reviews of the socialization literature (1982, 1983) showed how sex-differentiated child-rearing practices, such as the different ways of handling male and female infants and the different toys and equipment provided for boys and girls, had important implications for early motor skill development and subsequent sport involvement. One negative outcome for girls is a lower level of motor ability -- throwing or hitting a ball, for example -- and, thus, their lack of enjoyment and interest in games requiring these skills.

Having experienced early socialization toward domestic and doll play, girls are likely to select play activities that promote verbal, affective and interpersonal skills. Boys' early experience of vigorous interaction with parents and with toys and equipment prepares them for physically challenging, rough play experiences in later childhood. One study of motivation in 9-12 year olds' formal and informal schoolyard games found that boys rated game skills and aggressive items (roughness and hurting people) significantly higher than girls. Enjoyment, fun and

meeting people were rated higher by girls (Watson and Wells, 1984). Many such studies endorse boys' experiences and attitudes as representing the ideal, while girls' avoidance of team games is deplored; it is rarely suggested that girls' approaches to play, at the very least, are less violent and more responsive to human needs.

Not surprisingly, many children and teachers, as well as many researchers, give primacy to what they see as the male way of approaching sport. A female teacher who coached baseball, interviewed by Green (1987) in her investigation of Canadian children's schoolyard play, made it clear that she preferred boys' "forthright upfront ways of dealing with life." She explained: "The girls are sucks -- they don't say anything during the game, they just come up to me afterwards and want to discuss it. The boys swear or hit and then get on with it ... Frankly I prefer the boys. They're easier to deal with. The girls get too emotional about their friendships -- they get 'cliquey' and dependent on each other. The boys are more open. You can join the group once you have the skills to play." In support of Gilligan's hypothesis, we see the boys' pragmatic reliance on rights -- the right to play "once you have the skills' -- and the girls' caring and concern about friendships, and their preference for negotiating conflict verbally rather than resorting to physical aggression.

Numerous studies of children's play patterns illustrate the tendency to play in same-sex groupings and the sex-differentiated patterns of play. While most of these studies, of necessity, use

qualitative methods such as observations and interviews, the interpreting and scoring of these findings is often distorted by researchers' underlying assumption the boys' play patterns are superior. Typical of this deficit model is Seagoe's Play Report, used in Sleet's (1985) study to measure social complexity in grade 4 children's play choices. Low scores on this scale indicated self-directed, informal-individual play, while high scores indicated "cooperative-competitive play which is formally patterned toward team victory"(my emphasis) (p.284) Boys scored consistently scored higher than girls, hardly a surprising outcome given the high rating assigned to traditional male team games.

Studies by Lindsay (1984), Kraft (1987), Evans (1987), ~~Thorne (1986)~~ and Green (1987) represent a more balanced and egalitarian approach to children's play. In Lindsay's study of Edmonton children, girls had a greater variety of games than boys, and played in smaller groups that facilitated changing games. Boys' games showed more organization and less variety. Taking turns and focusing attention on individual performance were characteristics of girls' games, whereas boys played team games with increasingly competitive orientations as they got older. Kraft (1989), in his observations of Delaware children, reported more activity on the part of boys, and more social interaction, talking and sedentary play among girls. His was one of the few studies to include race as a variable; he found that black girls were more active than white girls, but also spent more time in solitary behaviour and in observing others, perhaps because of their minority status in the school.

Evans' (1986) observations of team selection processes among Illinois children confirmed that elementary school age girls were more concerned with positive interpersonal relationships, while boys were concerned with positive performance outcomes. Team games were mostly played by boys or by mixed groups, and never by girls only. The level of the game's organization increased with age, and cross-sex interaction was less likely among older children. Most boys played some kind of game during recess, while many grade 5 and 6 girls engaged in quiet conversation in the schoolyard. Team selection for mixed teams was usually controlled by boys. The stated reasons were as follows: 'fair' or 'even' teams required the best players, that is, boys, as captains; girls selected their (female) friends first; girls didn't know who the good players were; boys would make selections based on ability and hence choose balanced teams. The girls themselves were aware the dilemma of choosing for balanced teams or choosing to avoid conflict with their best girlfriends. Both for this reason and for their perceived inferior capabilities, boys viewed girls as liabilities in team games. Although many girls challenged this perception, they were under no illusion regarding their status in the eyes of the boys: "We're girls and we're no good." Those who did play mixed team games were frustrated when they were deliberately kept out of the flow of the game by aggressive boys.

Green's (1987) observations were conducted in a racially and ethnically diverse Toronto public school. She found that boys were always the first to claim the baseball diamond or the wall

of the school for ball games. When the girls were asked why they didn't get there early to get a space, they shrugged and said, "Who cares? It's not that important." Asked about the diamond, one girl said, with thinly veiled contempt: "They can have it. It's only a game. Anyway, what else can boys do?" Girls viewed themselves, with some pride, as noncompetitive; for example, they could perform as well as boys on the climbing equipment, but they preferred to perform tricks and to share their techniques with other girls. As for their views on boys, they said: "The boys act like monkeys: they think they're tough. They kick and have ring fights and say dumb things like 'I can beat you,' 'No you can't.'"

The distinctive feature of older girls' activities in Green's observations was the time they spent standing around talking in the school yard or the washroom. Most studies of playground behaviour, especially those conducted by male researchers, fail to investigate this behaviour fully. Green found that their conversations covered a range of topics: family matters (a death in the family), schoolwork, boys, clothing and hairstyles, popular music and TV, and friendship. Talking was seen primarily as problem-solving: "You can tell your friend things you can't even tell your mother 'cause she might not understand." Friends were chosen for "personality and support."

Empathy and reciprocity were highly valued in these friendships. A few quieter boys were sometimes admitted to the group because "you can talk to them just like a girl." Girls were aware that most boys "don't let it out -- they only talk sports, not private things." Clearly this was seen as boys'

shortcoming; these girls were proud of the support and sharing that went on in their groups. Given the limited opportunities for private discussions during class time, it is not surprising that many girls would forego the opportunity to play during recess and lunch hours, in order to catch up with the more important activity of supporting and sharing with friends.

Research on adolescents' and adults' interests in sport and physical activity show similar patterns to children's. Crossman (1988) investigated the sport interests of female high school students aged 13 to 19 in Northwestern Ontario; like Lever, she assumed that organized sport was superior. She found that 55.5% regularly participated in organized sport and 89.7% in unorganized sports, specifically, swimming, biking, running and skiing. Noting that many adult women currently participated in organized sports such as baseball, curling and volleyball, Crossman claimed that the school had a responsibility to prepare girls for lifelong physical activity by encouraging their participation in these kinds of sports. The possibility that the next generation of women may prefer unorganized to organized sport was apparently not considered. Indeed, if health, fitness and social interaction continue to be high priorities for female participants, the organizational complexity of a sport may well be irrelevant.

We will now turn to the question of adults' attitudes to sport. Most of these studies use quantitative methods such as questionnaires, and thus fail to take the full context of women's lives into account; situational factors such as time, money and

access, as well as women's changing affiliative needs, are not considered. Furthermore, many studies continue to use models that assign little or no merit to female values.

A 1985 review of the literature on attitudes using Kenyon's (1968) model found that females (and non-athletes) tended to rate social experience, health and fitness, and aesthetic dimensions as most important, while males (and athletes) valued the ascetic, vertigo and cathartic dimensions (Mathes and Battista, 1985). A 1985 study using Kenyon's model found that even in the unstructured context of a fitness class, men valued self-competitive, goal-oriented fitness, whereas women were more oriented toward self-expression and the aesthetic component (Biddle and Bailey, 1985).

Webb (1969) developed the "professionalization of attitude" scale which asked subjects to rank the following: to play fairly; to play as well as you can; and to beat your opponent. Defeating the opponent was presented as the most advanced and desirable, i.e., the most "professional" attitude. Studies using Webb's scale found that boys and competitive athletes ranked skill and victory higher than girls and nonathletes. A 1985 study, using a scale that combined Kenyon's and Webb's dimensions, reported that men (and athletes) valued competition significantly more than women (and nonathletes) who ranked health and fitness, and social experience as their most important motives. The authors refer to Gilligan's theorization of sex-specific attitudes to human relationships to explain some of these differences (Mathes and Battista, 1985).

McElroy (1983) developed a Sport Value Orientations

questionnaire that asked for a ranking of Webb's three dimensions and added a fourth: "everyone on the team should get to play." Winning and skill as "traditional male" values, and fair play and 'everyone plays' as "traditional female" values; significantly, she assigned high scores to male values and low scores to female values.

Another recent study of "professionalization of attitude," using Webb's scale, reported that females in the early 1980s had higher scores than in Webb's 1969 research, and that the gender gap in all classifications had decreased (Blair, 1985). Citing the recent effects of Title IX, Blair predicted that female athletes in the future "may exhibit more concern toward winning" if opportunities continue to increase (Blair, 1985; 83). Similarly, a 1987 study found that women who competed in the 1970s differed from those who competed in the 1980s. The latter were more likely to list competition and skill reasons, while the 1970s sportswomen gave social reasons, specifically that sport allowed them to be with friends (Croxton et al. 1987). These researchers all viewed women's increasing competitiveness as a positive trend.

In a feminist critique of the literature on "professionalization of attitude," Knoppers (1985) referred to Gilligan's theory as a possible explanation for the pervasive sex difference. Females may value success, but with reservations, since they realize that their achievement is usually at the expense of someone's failure. While winning for males is clearly defined, females may see success in sport as having more complex repercussions, by threatening their relationships with others.

Traditional quantitative methods are unable to uncover the complex nature of women's attitudes and practices, and the entrenched assumption that competitiveness is a mark of the superior male sport orientation has produced serious sex biases in research instruments. The effectiveness of participant observation and interviews has been demonstrated in play studies, and can readily be transferred to adult sport and recreation settings, as some investigators have shown (e.g. Kenen, 1986). However, qualitative findings are also subject to misinterpretation if the female deficit model is not challenged. Such findings need to be analysed in terms of women's specific gender, class, race and sexuality locations in the broader society. In this way, we will be able to identify, validate and provide for girls' and women's needs and interests in sport and physical activity, rather than assuming that they are, or should be, identical to those of boys and men.

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